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EDITORIAL NOTES

The appearance of the fiftieth anniversary volume of the National Educational Association presents occasion for some reflections upon the aim and efficiency of this organization. Whatever else may be said of it, this at least is true: it is the largest educational society of its kind in the world. English, German, and French school men all seem to be well informed respecting the magnitude and general character of the National Educational Association; and they appear to regard it as a strong and useful institution, the like of which they would be pleased to have in their respective countries. It is probable that the association is as well thought of abroad as at home; indeed it is possible foreigners esteem it more highly than we do ourselves, for it cannot be doubted that there is among us a rising tide of criticism of its tendencies and policies. The foreigner thinks of the society as a union of all progressive teachers in this country, to the end that educational problems may be freely discussed; that all advances in teaching may be popularized; and that sound laws affecting the schools may be enacted and carried into effect. But here at home one frequently hears it said, and with much feeling often, that the association is under the control of a "ring," and that ambitious and more or less selfish men are using it for their own glorification at the expense of the cause of educational betterment in our country. That these complaints come from malcontents and soreheads is freely charged by those in the seats of the mighty; but where the truth lies in respect to the questions at issue it is not for us to say.

However, from an examination of the volume before us it is possible to estimate with some confidence the work which the association, during the fifty years of its existence has done for American education. The arrangement by years as well as by subjects of all the programmes of the association since its foundation enables one to see what phases of education have engaged the attention of school men during the last half century. The first point that impresses one is—when the association was organized there was great need of some effective means for teachers to exchange views and to standardize educational opinion and practice to a certain extent. The association served in an earlier day as a clearing-house for educational ideas and propositions; and in order that theories respecting reforms in teaching or administration should get into general circulation and be accepted by the craft, it was necessary that they should pass through this clearing-house. The men who were contributing most largely to sound educational progress were the leaders in the association twenty-five years ago, say, and they attacked their problems in a serious if not altogether effective manner. As

the association developed it became a more and more powerful instrument for good, and the range of its activities and its influence grew apace. Whereas in the beginning the society was content with a single programme of a general character, in due course differentiation set in, and teachers with special interests began to flock by themselves for a part of every meeting, and to have a programme of their own. This process of specialization has gone on developing until now there are twenty or more distinct departments, most of them larger than the original society.

Meanwhile the general association has successfully resisted the forces that have threatened arrest of development. It could probably be demonstrated that as the sections were formed they took up the consideration of the newer and perhaps more vital problems to be solved, and the general association was left to deal in generalities and commonplaces, to some extent at any rate. The aim has always been during the last years to make the general programme "popular." With audiences of from three to ten thousand, nothing but popular material would suit. A man cannot solve educational problems, and entertain a vast crowd of pleasure-seekers at the same time; though, if he is of a good sort he may popularize movements of importance and merit. Without question, the general programme of the association has accomplished much in the latter direction; but nevertheless there has been of necessity, perhaps, some talk to the galleries these last years. It is freely said among school people that men who spoke their pieces a decade ago have kept on telling the same tales. They seem to have been unwilling to let go, so that the new forces in education have not been able to get a hold. And with what result? The National Educational Association is hardly today the clearing-house it was a decade ago for fresh educational ideas, though some of the departments are in the forefront of progress. But if a man wishes to keep in touch with the latest and best in educational theory and practice he is not as likely as men once were to look to the *Proceedings* of the National Educational Association for it, although the contents of the present volume are exceptionally good. It is questionable whether the National Educational Association is now the instrument *par excellence* by means of which new and fruitful notions in education can be published to the world, and given practical effect.

What is it then that has made and that keeps this association the largest in the world? First and principally the efforts of a most devoted and efficient secretary, who in an exceptionally skilful way keeps this great machine running smoothly, and without retardation at any point. Then, it is the finest tourist bureau for teachers to be found anywhere, and it is of distinct service in just this way. Foreigners who imagine that the ten or fifteen thousand teachers who attend the meetings of the National Educational Association are devoted primarily to the programme would be speedily disillusioned if they should go to Cleveland, say, next July. But this does not imply that these teachers receive no benefit; they do, most certainly, and

this feature of the National Educational Association should not be abandoned. But it is to be feared that the aim of popularity, made desirable on account of the vast size of the association, with the consequent keeping in the lime-light of men some of whom have not been advancing in educational theory, and who do not quite fully understand contemporary tendencies, is in danger of robbing the National Educational Association of its vitality, and its influence upon professional thought and action. If during the next decade the association moves along the lines it now seems to be pursuing many of the really growing men in this country may become detached from it, which, if it so happens, will prove a misfortune. This does not mean that in such an event it would be without members; not at all; but these would comprise mainly the excitement- and pleasure-seeking persons on the one hand, and the old guard after offices on the other hand.

The times are changing in education, which makes it advisable that the National Educational Association should revise its methods in certain respects. We have already entered the era of scientific study of problems of teaching, and what is now needed is for this great association to set agoing vigorously machinery which will produce results of scientific value for educational theory and practice. What an opportunity the National Council has had to lead in the forward movement! And how completely it has failed to take advantage of the opportunity! This National Council of Statics is already lost in the rear of educational advance in this country, and we must look elsewhere for some guiding body. Here is a chance for the National Educational Association to use its influence and its funds to study problems of contemporary interest, and to popularize the results of such investigation. This should be its field. It has under its command a fund which if used for research in education by men and women capable of doing the work effectively would contribute much toward sane educational reform. In its series of *Reports* it has already attempted something along the line indicated; but after all, most of these *Reports* are simply a codification of the opinions and experiences of a body of men who have not studied the problems discussed in a thoroughgoing manner. Some of them have proved of service, but others are not of great value. If the energy and devotion and ability which have developed this magnificent organization could now throw its influence in the direction of effective educational investigation and popularization of the results thereof it would continue to be the greatest as well as the largest educational association in the world.

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